

What we want from the Federal Budget

(The Courier: page 1&2 11th May 2009)

11/05/2009 12:12:00 AM

WANTED: a big spend-up on infrastructure.

The call for the Federal Government to spend on projects in preference to tax breaks or cash handouts has been echoed by the Committee for Ballarat, the University of Ballarat, the Australian Industry Group, Ballarat Trades Hall and the Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions group.

The Committee for Ballarat has applauded what it describes as "nation building initiatives" such as the high-speed broadband network and proposals to increase the efficiency of road, rail and port transport.

In a joint statement, the committees for Ballarat, Geelong and Perth have described cash handouts and personal tax concessions as "short-term initiatives with narrow impact and limited coverage".

"Major infrastructure projects, particularly those designed to build prosperous futures, are sustainable, and are employment and business-activity focused will provide much better returns," the committees said.

University of Ballarat vice-Chancellor David Battersby said the university had applied for federal funding of projects, including a \$40 million science and engineering precinct at Mt Helen, a \$20 million manufacturing centre of excellence at the SMB campus along with several smaller TAFE projects. "We would like to think that at least one of the three would get up," he said.

BREAZE president Nick Lanyon said large-scale renewable energy infrastructure could see the nation emerge from recession with a more sustainable economy. Mr Lanyon said such renewable energy projects could also create "green" jobs at a time when traditional manufacturing jobs were being lost.

Ballarat MHR Catherine King said with the Deer Park Bypass completed, she was looking forward to full funding to finish the realignment of Anthony's Cutting and the duplication of the Western Hwy under AusLink 2.

"I have also been lobbying hard for funding for infrastructure at the University of Ballarat, particularly their proposal for a manufacturing centre, which would give a much-needed boost to the manufacturing sector in Ballarat," she said.

"I am also keen to see increased support for aged pensioners.

"We have recently seen state funding go to improving birthing services at Ballarat Health Services and I hope to see federal support for perinatal services in the region."

Western Highway Action Group chairman Noel Perry said the government's allocation, so far, of \$5 million for the duplication would get planning under way, but the balance of the \$40 million was needed before construction could begin.

Ballarat Trades Hall assistant secretary Bob Bassett said investment in infrastructure would have a trickle down benefit to manufacturing workers and it was important that the government acted to preserve the manufacturing industry already hit hard by the economic downturn.

The Australian Industry Group issued a statement in which it said the government should "catch up on an infrastructure backlog" even if this meant going into debt.

"A future debt figure of around \$200 to \$300 billion that could see Australia's public sector debt reach between 15 per cent and 25 per cent of GDP is within a range that compares very favourably with current levels in the US and Germany," AIG chief executive officer Heather Ridout said.